National Center for Health Statistics

CDC

...Monitoring the Nation's Health

National Vital Statistics System

About NCHS

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the Nation's principal health statistics agency, providing data to identify and address health issues. NCHS compiles statistical information to help guide public health and health policy decisions.

Collaborating with other public and private health partners, NCHS employs a variety of data collection mechanisms to obtain accurate information from multiple sources. This process provides a broad perspective to help us understand the population's health, influences on health, and health outcomes.

National Vital Statistics System

The National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) provides the Nation's official vital statistics data based on the collection and registration of birth and death events at the state and local level. NVSS provides the most complete and continuous data available to public health officials at the national, state and local levels, and in the private sector.

Vital statistics are a critical component of our national health information system, allowing us to monitor progress toward achieving important health goals.

Examples of NVSS data:

- Teen births and birth rates
- Prenatal care and birthweight
- Risk factors for adverse pregnancy outcomes
- Infant mortality rates
- Life expectancy
- Leading causes of death

Examples of NVSS Data

Teen births

The teen birth rate is an important indicator of population change and helps to describe patterns of early family formation. Teenagers are least likely to receive timely prenatal care, are more likely to smoke, and more likely to have a low birthweight infant, all of which lead to poorer health outcomes.

- Preliminary 2013 data show the **birth rate for U.S. teenagers** aged 15–19 was 26.6 births per 1,000, another historic low for the United States and down 10 percent from 2012. This rate is less than one-half of what it was in 1991.

- Despite the recent declines, there are large disparities in teen (ages 15–19) birth rates. In 2013, teen birth rates were highest for Hispanic teenagers (41.9 per 1,000), non-Hispanic black teenagers (39.2), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native teenagers (31.2), non-Hispanic white teenagers (18.7), and Asian/Pacific Islander teenagers (8.8).

Birth rates for females aged 15–19 years, by race/ethnicity: United States, 1991-2013
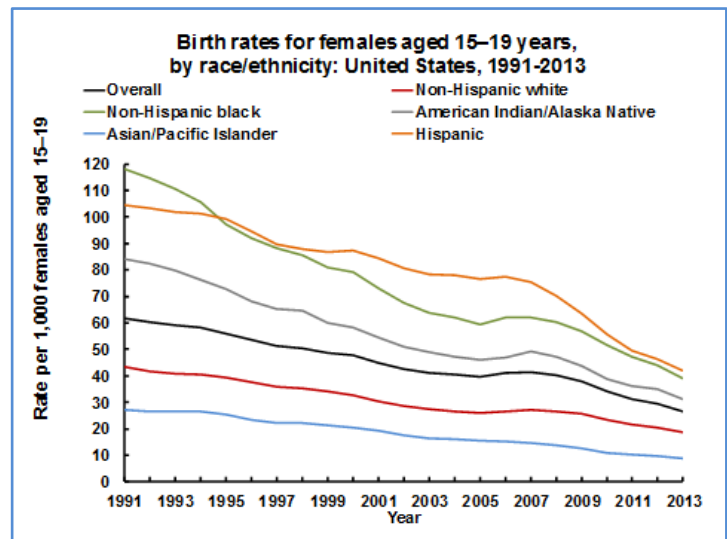
Note: Data for 2013 are preliminary.
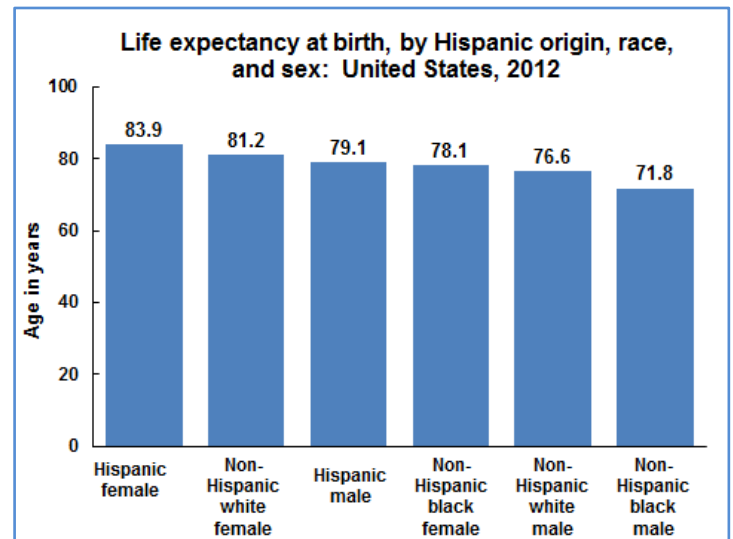**Source**: National Vital Statistics System, 1991–2013.

Births

- Preliminary data show that after climbing by about 20 percent between 1990 and 2006, the rate of **preterm birth** declined for the seventh straight year in 2013 to 11.38 percent of all births.

- The **cesarean delivery rate** showed a small decline to 32.7 percent in 2013, after increasing more than 50 percent from 1996 to 2009.

- The steady rise in **multiple births** has slowed. In 2012, the twin birth rate was 33.1 per 1,000 births, essentially unchanged from 2009 to 2011; the rate of triplet and higher-order multiple births dropped by 9 percent in 2012 to 124.4 per 100,000 births.

- **Births to unmarried women** declined for the fifth straight year in 2013 to 44.8 per 1,000 unmarried women aged 15–44.

Infant mortality

- The **infant mortality rate** decreased 1.5 percent from 6.07 to 5.98 infant deaths per 1,000 live births from 2011 to 2012.

- **Infant mortality rates** did not change significantly for major race-sex groups from 2011 to 2012.

Life expectancy

- **Life expectancy at birth** was 78.8 years in 2012. Life expectancy at birth for males increased from 76.3 in 2011 to 76.4 in 2012, and increased from 81.1 in 2011 to 81.2 in 2012 for females.

- In 2012, Hispanic females had the highest **life expectancy at birth** (83.9 years), followed by non-Hispanic white females (81.2 years), Hispanic males (79.1 years), non-Hispanic black females (78.1 years), non-Hispanic white males (76.6 years), and non-Hispanic black males (71.8 years).

Source: National Vital Statistics System, 2014.

Death rates

- Final data for 2012 show that age-adjusted death rates declined significantly for 10 of the 15 leading causes of death. Decreases in the age-adjusted death rate for the top two leading causes, **heart disease** and **cancer**, were 1.8 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively. In 2012, deaths from these two diseases accounted for 46.5 percent of all deaths in the United States.

- The age-adjusted death rate decreased between 2011 and 2012 for other leading causes including **chronic lower respiratory diseases** (2.4 percent), **stroke** (2.6 percent), **Alzheimer's disease** (3.6 percent), **diabetes** (1.9 percent), **influenza and pneumonia** (8.3 percent), **kidney disease** (2.2 percent), **septicemia** (1.9 percent), and **Pneumonitis due to solids and liquids** (3.8 percent).

Challenges and Future Opportunities

- Modernize the technology infrastructure of the U.S. vital statistics system by moving states from outdated paper-based systems to web-based systems integrated with other public health information systems, and re-engineering the NCHS automated coding system. These technologies will allow for rapid compilation and use of these critical data sources, and will enable the vital statistics system to more effectively contribute to (1) the public health surveillance of disease outbreaks at the community, state, and national levels, and (2) public health policy decisions at all levels of government.

For further information about NCHS and its programs, visit http://www.cdc.gov/nchs.
For further information on the NVSS, visit http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm.